

8 Qualities
— of a —
Great Sunday
School Teacher

by Greg Baird



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— of a —
**Great Sunday
School Teacher**



About this Guide

You're responsible for teaching kids week in and week out, but most people serving in children's ministry need to learn the skills on the fly.

That's why children's pastor and blogger Greg Baird has partnered with Disciplr to create this simple guide on qualities that mark a great Sunday school teacher. This is a quick read that will give you an idea of which qualities to pursue growth in as you continue making disciples of future generations.

Who is this guide for?

These qualities can probably extend to most people who teach in the local church, but we put this resource together with two people in mind:

1. Children's ministry leaders. We made this especially for those responsible for teaching kids, organizing volunteers, and casting the vision for the children's ministry in their local churches.
2. Volunteer teachers in children's ministry. This is a guide to help volunteer teams grow as teachers. The practical tips in this guide will set up volunteers to have a lasting, God-glorifying influence on the next generation.

And if that's not you, your secret is safe with us! You're still welcome to enjoy this guide.

About Greg Baird

I serve as the Vice President of Global Resources in the Global Mission department at David C. Cook. Essentially, my role is to create partnerships globally and to develop and deliver ministry training around the world.

I love what I do as it is the outflow of 20 years of ministry experience as

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Children's, Family & Administrative Pastor, consultant, trainer, speaker and short-term missions leader. I also blog at ChildrensMinistryLeader.com, and do a limited amount of ministry coaching, consulting and speaking (you can [contact me](#) here).

On the personal side, I grew up in a Christian home travelling the world, first as a military brat (living in four states and Japan by the time I was eight) and then as a missionary kid (moving to Tasmania, Australia for my high school years). I love sports—World Cup soccer, the Chargers and Padres top the list. And I love to read, write and have conversations about ministry and leadership in general. My newest pursuit is road biking!

About Disciplr

Disciplr is a digital platform created for teachers in the local church. The Disciplr team noticed that while teachers often get into ministry to make disciples, they're bogged down by the process of finding, managing, assigning, and presenting materials. Disciplr simplifies this process by giving leaders a single, digital place to find their material, manage volunteers, and present to the class.

Want to know more? Check out Disciplr.com.

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A
HEART
— FOR —
GOD



A Heart for God

Deuteronomy 6:5–9 provides a model for teaching kids. It says,

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

While this is written to the nation of Israel in general, it can be adopted by parents and those who teach children in the church today. And, most of the time, we focus on the last half of this passage, where it describes how to pass on our faith in the everyday happenings of life.

This is important, but the first half of the passage is the foundation for passing on faith. What does it say? Basically, it says that we *first* must love God with everything we are. We demonstrate this love by allowing “these commandments” (God’s Word) to be on our heart. By doing this, we develop a heart for God. And why is this important? Because Scripture tells us that what we speak (teach) comes from our heart (Luke 6:34). It also says that “where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Without God being our treasure—a heart for God—we cannot hope to adequately pass on our faith. When we do have a heart for God, our ministry and teaching will naturally flow from that place.

This is important because Scripture also tells us that teachers in the church

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will be held to a higher standard (James 3:1). I believe this includes those who teach children: we are every bit teachers in the church as teachers of adults in the church. Our audience (children) is every bit as important as those who sit in the sanctuary (primarily adults). In fact, I would argue that our teaching may even be more important than teaching that is directed toward adults. Jesus told his disciples that the faith of a child—pure, innocent, trusting and hopeful—is the very type of faith all of us should have. We dare not interfere with that faith, but if we don't start with a heart for God, that is the very danger we risk when we teach these little ones.

So, first and foremost, as teachers we ought to ensure we have a heart for God. It is the starting point: the very place where our teaching and ministry ought to flow from. That is why, in Proverbs 4:23, we are told that “*Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.*”

A
LOVE
— FOR —
PEOPLE



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As a children's pastor, I once had a Sunday school teacher who seemed to always come to church in a sour mood. She said she wanted to teach. She said she had taught kids for years. She said she wanted to make a difference in their lives. She even came voluntarily to talk with me about serving.

But she never had a smile on her face. She never seemed to be happy. And she was always short with the kids.

I tried to encourage and challenge her to smile, to exhibit joy, and to be more cordial with the kids in her class and their parents. I asked her if everything was OK and if there was anything I could do to serve her better. I tried to joke with her, and talked about how important it was for kids to have fun.

Nothing worked. Miss Sourface never changed.

Finally, after just a few weeks of serving in our children's ministry, I got straight to the point and I asked her, "Why does it always seem like you're in a bad mood? It comes across to our people like you don't like them." And without hesitation she responded, almost incredulously, "Well, I don't."

"Wait. What? You don't like people?" I thought to myself, fumbling for an adequate way to respond.

No, she didn't like people. She simply felt like she needed to serve somewhere and children's ministry seemed like a good place to do it.

Needless to say, I quickly removed her from teaching—and added a few questions to my interview process! Not only do we need to "like" people, but we need to have a genuine love for people in order to effectively teach people.

This is especially true in children's ministry, because children are not mature enough to look past what's lacking to grasp hold of what's being taught.

Love matters when teaching children.

As we said earlier, our teaching ought to flow *from* our love for God but *because* of our love for people. Teaching children the things of God ought to be driven by a deep desire to see them fall in love with that same God—because we love them. Teaching children the things of God ought to be driven by a deep desire to see them grow in the character of God and become more like Jesus—because we love them. Teaching children the things of God ought to be driven by a deep desire to see them embrace the principles of Scripture and apply them to their daily lives as they grow up—because we love them.

Everything about teaching children in Sunday school ought to start and stop with a deep love for those people we are teaching. It *flows* from our love for God, but *because* of our love for people.

A
PASSION
— FOR —
GOD'S
WORD



God's Word is the very source of our teaching. It contains the stories of faith that we draw from. It shows the way of salvation and the way we are to live. It teaches us the principles by which we are to do everything in our lives. It's why we teach and what we teach.

But before we teach to others, we need to be saturated in the Word ourselves. We need to have a passion for the Word.

How do we do that?

Read it. I like to say that the Bible is simply a letter from God. Any one of us would pour over a letter from a dearly loved friend or family member. We would read and re-read the letter to engage with what they are saying. And yet, too often, our letter from God—the One who loves us most and Who we desire to have a heart for—goes unread. Oh sure, we might pull it off the shelf to look up the verses from our lesson, but that's not primarily why we ought to read it. We ought to read it because it's God's Word to each and every one of us.

Meditate on it. Not only should we read God's Word, but we ought to let it soak in to our very being. One of the ways we do that is through meditating on what it says. Joshua 1:8 shows us that meditating on the Word will help us to "be careful to do everything written in it." When we are saturated in the Word, it will naturally flow through our teaching.

Memorize it. Psalm 119:11 says, "I have hidden your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you." It's pretty simple—having God's Word "in our heart" helps keep us on track in our daily lives. And one of the best ways to hide God's Word in our heart is to memorize it. Often times we will expect the children in our classes to memorize Scripture, but we've gotten out of the habit of doing it ourselves.

A
HABIT
— OF —
PRAYING



A Habit of Praying

Praying is a reflection of our dependence on God in our everyday lives and in our teaching. The less we pray, the more we show we believe we don't need God. Scripture tells us to "pray without ceasing," which simply means that we are to have a constant mindset of being in the presence of God, of being in conversation with God. As teachers, this dependence is critical. Because we are teaching the things of God, we need to be in the presence of God. We do this through being in His Word and praying.

As teachers, there are specific things we ought to continually pray about and for, including:

The salvation of our kids. Ultimately, what we are all about is the gospel. We want our kids to know Jesus in a personal way. Not only should we continually place the gospel before them in our teaching, but we ought to also pray that God would move in their lives and hearts to hear and receive the gospel.

The spiritual growth of our kids. When children in our class do respond to the gospel, they become disciples of Christ. As disciples, we are all to grow in our faith. Yet, just like us, children face challenges that inhibit and hinder their growth. The difference is that they may not yet recognize some of the dangers. They may not yet be equipped to deal with some of the challenges. And they may have no one who is concerned about their spiritual growth away from your class. As teachers, we have the unique and special privilege to be able to influence their spiritual growth all week long—through our prayers.

The parents of our kids. The spiritual formation of the children in your class is primarily the responsibility of their parents. Their parents have exponentially more influence on their children than you or I do. For this reason, we ought to pray for them. We ought to pray for understanding of this responsibility, that this is a priority in their lives, and that they would be fully equipped to invest in the daily spiritual development of their child.

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Our own ability to teach. In the Psalms, David continually prays for himself. He prays for protection, he prays for guidance and he prays for God to intervene on his behalf. He may not have been teaching a Sunday school class, but I'm sure he would pray for these same things if he were! As teachers, we need to pray for protection—the enemy would love nothing more than to distract us and destroy the faith that we are trying to pass on to our kids. We need to pray for guidance, to fully understand what we are trying to teach and for the ability to teach it well. And we need to pray for God to intervene, as ultimately children will grasp the Faith not because of our teaching, but because God moves in their lives.

Let me share this quote again as a reminder of the importance of prayer:

“Prayer does not equip us for greater works, prayer is the greater work.”

Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest*

A
COMMITMENT
— TO —
PERSONAL
GROWTH



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You cannot pass on to others what you do not first possess yourself.

As Sunday school teachers, we want to teach in a way that initiates growth in our students. We study, prepare for, and deliver lessons. We prepare activities and try to be creative in our teaching. We hope and expect that this work will pay off in the lives of our kids through growth in their lives.

Yet oftentimes we neglect growth in our own lives.

Luke 2:52 says that “Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.” This referred to when Jesus was a young man, yet it’s a model that we can use for our entire lives. We need to commit to healthy growth in all areas of our lives. This results in better teaching and, more importantly, a greater ability to influence the lives of others.

How do we grow? The best way I know is twofold: grow daily, and plan for future growth.

John Maxwell says “Growth does not happen in a day, it happens daily.” When we are growing, it happens little by little, not all at once. We might go through “growth spurts,” but it’s usually slow and steady that we see growth really happening.

And this “slow and steady” rarely happens without a plan. So what’s your plan for growth? I would suggest that each of our plans will look different. The way you grow best will probably look different from the way I grow best. We each need to intentionally design a plan for daily growth.

The important thing is not so much that you have the perfect plan, but just that you have a plan. (It can be tweaked as often as you like!) To use the model that described Jesus, build in ways to grow in:

- Wisdom, perhaps through reading or being mentored.
- Stature, or physically—it’s amazing how our health affects everything else we do.

A Commitment to Personal Growth

- In favor with God, or spiritually; we've already addressed spiritual growth by having a heart for God, a passion for God's Word and a commitment to prayer.
- In favor with man, or socially, which might include everything from your ability to communicate to your ability and willingness to invest in authentic relationships.

AN
ABILITY
— TO —
TEACH



We are all gifted in one way or another when we become part of God's family. Some of us are gifted to teach—it just seems to come naturally! Others of us, however, are not so gifted in this area. Does this mean they shouldn't teach? No! I believe that most individuals can learn how to teach.

I've listed several abilities that Sunday school teachers ought to have in order to teach well.

An ability to be child-centered.

As adults, we too often approach teaching children like, well, adults. But they are children! Being child-centered means we recognize that and intentionally shape our teaching for this. It means that we:

- Ensure their safety. Yes, safety is an important part of teaching. And as we work with the most vulnerable group in the church (emotionally, physically and spiritually), it's important that we keep this in mind.
- Work at making our environment attractive. What does our room look like to a kid? Is it a place they want to be? Is it a place that draws them in? Does the furniture fit their bodies? Being child-centered means we look at the environment through their eyes.
- Teach in age-appropriate ways. A child's attention span equals roughly one minute per year of their age. When we teach 5 year olds, are we changing focus about every 5 minutes? Or do we lecture for 30? Do we tell stories, or share facts? Do we let children get involved in an experience, or expect them simply to remember what we told them?

An ability to be application-oriented.

David and Goliath is a great story! But it's just a story if the child doesn't know what it means to them when they leave church. How are we helping

children *apply* principles of God’s Word rather than just telling them *about* God’s Word? I like to use what I call the “this week” measurement—what am I giving the child that they can take home and apply to their lives in a practical way *this week*?

An ability to be relational.

Ministry always happens best in the context of relationships, period. The deeper the relationship, the greater the ability to teach. As teachers, we must invest in knowing the child in order to enhance our ability to be heard and accepted when we teach.

An ability to be creative.

Creativity is a gift—and I don’t have it! But creativity is essential to teaching effectively. So, if I’m not creative, I need to learn and borrow from and engage with those who are. That might mean having a creative person in your ministry help you be more creative in your teaching, or it might mean spending some time doing research to find those creative ideas to enhance your lesson.

An ability to have fun.

I once had a pastor tell me “There’s no place for ‘fun’ in the church!” I responded by telling him that, if that were true, then there’s no place for kids in the church, because God made them to giggle and laugh—and have fun! And I guarantee that, if a child is not experiencing fun at church, then they are not experiencing life change either. And I have found that one of the best ways to ensure that children are having fun is to ensure that the teacher is having fun, too!

A
WILLINGNESS
— TO —
PREPARE



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A huge part of teaching is preparation. As the old saying goes, “If you fail to prepare, prepare to fail.” This is certainly true in most areas of our life, and it’s certainly true in teaching. That scramble to get the lesson ready on Saturday evening usually doesn’t work too well. And reading the lesson for the first time as you drive to church most definitely doesn’t work well! Here are a few ideas on preparing well for teaching.

Recognize the need to invest in preparation. Not preparing is essentially saying that what we are doing (teaching) really isn’t important. None of us would say that, but our actions reveal it. If we understand that teaching really is important, then we will understand the need to prepare properly.

Create a preparation schedule. Rarely do we do our best preparation all at once. Instead, doing a little bit at a time helps us do things better and it helps it seem more manageable. You might try something like this:

- Early in the week, do a few things that will help you in your preparation. This might include: reviewing the lesson to get an idea of what you will be teaching; jotting down the scriptures you’ll be referring to so you can read them through a few times before you actually begin prepping the lesson; making a list of supplies so you can get them while you are out.
- By midweek, carve out some time and seriously run through the lesson, actually planning activities, preparing the sequence, and practicing the teaching.
- By Friday, have all the supplies and all your teaching preparation done,
- Saturday, take a few minutes to review and finalize last-minute items.
- Of course, throughout the week include prayer with all of the preparation steps you take.

Invest in understanding your class. The better we know the people we are teaching, the better we will be able to teach. Understanding such things as

A Willingness to Prepare

learning styles, personality traits, and individual home situations for each child you teach will only enhance your effectiveness. This might require some extra relationship building time outside of class!

Equip yourself with teaching skills. There are basic skills for teaching which we can all improve. Storytelling, classroom management, asking questions to make kids think, and many other skills are important. Attend teacher trainings, take time to search out reading materials in these areas, and practice these skills whenever you can.

Preparation takes time. It takes effort. And it takes intentionality. But every minute you spend preparing will pay off significantly in the classroom. It's worth it!

A
DEDICATION
— TO —
THE PEOPLE
THEY TEACH



A Dedication to the People They Teach

There are many reasons why we teach Sunday school. We might respond to a desperate plea from the pastor or the person leading the Sunday school. We might feel it's an obligation we have as a parent. It could be that we enjoy working with kids. Or maybe we want to exercise our spiritual gifts and this was an area that presented an opportunity.

Whatever the reason that we find ourselves teaching, we need to understand that, first and foremost, it's an opportunity to change a life, to affect eternity, and to be powerfully used by God. And it's also an opportunity for God to do powerful work in our own lives.

For all of these reasons, we ought to take teaching seriously, as a calling that God has led us in to. Taking a calling seriously means dedicating ourselves to it. The things we've mentioned previously all take time. They all take effort. They all take discipline and dedication. That's what is required for effective teaching.

Most of all, teaching takes a dedication to the people we teach.

The word *dedicate* means "to devote wholly and earnestly." Too often when we volunteer to teach, we treat it as a task on our to-do list instead of calling to be dedicated to. But teaching impacts lives. Teaching makes a difference. It is not something to give cursory attention to. It's something to give complete attention to. And when we do the things we've talked about previously, we are doing just that.

Have a heart for God. Love the people you teach. Develop a passion for God's Word. Be in the habit of praying. Grow personally. Teach well. Prepare well. These show a dedication to the people you are teaching.

Finally, being dedicated to the people you teach means making an investment. It costs time. It costs energy. It usually costs money. And it can be messy because people's lives (including our own) are messy. Teaching

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doesn't just mean delivering the lesson, but it also means engaging in relationship. Being there to answer questions. Being there to soothe a hurt. Being there in the struggle and in the victory.

That's when real teaching happens. That's when real change happens. That's what dedication really looks like.

THANKS — FOR — READING

You can read more of Greg's ministry advice at
[ChildrensMinistryLeader.com](https://www.ChildrensMinistryLeader.com).

You can also get discipleship tips from the [Disciplr blog](#).

If you enjoyed this guide, we suggest you share it with your friends. Everyone loves to hear about free resources!

